

Ultra Sound

Recorded under water and projected through a sand-blasted glass lens suspended in an aquarium filled with water, procedurally and visually looping digital video images ripple and flicker on the wall. Like an otherworldly sprite from some fantastical black and white silent film¹, a male figure awkwardly plays the xylophone under water. Folding and unfolding early filmic (read mythic) time and space into the embodied, localized present, Joe Kelly's simple low-fi contraption (a closed technological circuit of his own making²) locates the autonomous agent against the dependent; the filmic against the digital; the past against the present. Interrogating the methodologies, mechanisms, manipulations and meanings of information circuits/envelopes, the sequence reveals that the truth is not only projected but distorted as it filters through them.

Reigniting influential communications savant M. McLuhans notion of pre-technological auditory man³, Kelly's ostensibly silent environment transforms and alerts us to the nature and manner information is communicated to us the moment we tap into/plug into his thought-pool through the pair of earphones that dangle beside the aquarium. Recorded in the studio, played back through an underwater speaker and then picked up and relayed to headphones by an underwater microphone (a hydrophone), we hear a dissonant music, an aural text reshaped (like the film image) not only by the water but by the various technological filters it has been sque-e-e-e-e-ized/distorted through. Re-aligning our familiar stereoscopic sense of sound by making it omni-directional, water literally and figuratively becomes the medium an immersive totalizing acoustic space at once boundless, directionless, horizonless⁴: We get lost in the fluid that we're in.

Kelly challenges the impersonality of progressive (read: distancing) technologies, evading and opposing simultaneously de-individuating and globalizing prescribed circuits of meaning. De-authorizing the digital/cyber ether, his work beats an unpredictable non-linear path, shifting and straying like a dream where brain chemistries combine and recombine, synapses fire and mis-fire forming new connections and new readings, new autonomies and new truths. Induced by a potent and frequent dream of drowning of flailing in the water as well as traditional sea stories and folk tales from Newfoundland (where he grew up) that are populated by magical creatures and mischievous nymphs and faeries, it is understandable that water, wonder and a strange anxiety flow here: Drifting in the sublime but then gasping for breath, Kelly wakes/disengages from the dream, from the personal into the impersonal.

Collapsing science-ized digital time into analog dream time, fact into fiction, as well as paralleling two technologies that re-described our knowledge/reading of the world - the cinema

¹ See, for example, Mlis, Georges: *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, 1902, black and white silent film.

² Comparing his work to folk art, Kelly understands this system to be a personalized technology.

³ 3 McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium is the Massage*, 1967, Bantam Books, p. 120.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 48.

of the late 1800s and digital technologies of the late 1900s - Kelly prompts consideration of the failure of technology and science to provide answers, to lead us beyond the realities they construct - his work asking us to consider other ways of knowing, to relinquish our unconditional embrace.

Jack Anderson

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